

THE NEWS LETTER

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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MLTA

An Inquiry

"Gladly learn" and "gladly teach" suggest the double function of members of the CEA in their professional life. We are interested in the advancement of knowledge (our own and if possible the world's) and we are interested in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge among our students and in our society.

As scholars we are, most of us, members of a great national organization, the MLA, linked in common purposes with scholars in the various foreign languages and literatures. As teachers, however, we suffer from a certain isolation from other groups of modern language teachers and from the MLA itself.

Though we meet, like other groups of teachers, at the annual conventions of the MLA, we are in a sense outsiders, conducting our meetings, sometimes quarreling, at the doorsill.

While we suffer from this isolation, so does the MLA, which has never been happy in its limitation, since 1927, to "the advancement of research," again and again impelled by inescapable realities, to concern itself with education and with the place of letters in society.

The times call for a united front. Enjoying scant prestige before the war, the humanities during the war were brushed aside, except insofar as they could make a direct practical contribution. If they are to be revived after the war and set on a higher plane, they will have to put their house in order. They will have to reexamine their basic concepts and their guiding aims, and to do this effectively in a time of rapid change they will have to reconsider their pattern of organization.

If the MLA does not see fit to return to its pre-1927 wider realm of activity by including problems of education and of the place of letters in society, it might be willing to consider organizing a subsidiary or parallel association, the MLTA (Modern Language Teachers Association) composed of the members of the MLA in their capacity as teachers, since all but a handful of the members are teachers as well as scholars.

Enjoying the authority of a single comprehensive organization, the MLTA could at the same time provide for its various subjects by forming Departments (as distinguished from the Sections and Groups of the MLA) such as French, Spanish, German, English. The association might meet as a whole and by Departments for one day just preceding or following the annual meeting of the MLA. Most of its activities, however, might be conducted rather through regional meetings and a new journal. Possibly scholar-teachers should be

free to join one or the other organization or both.

It would naturally follow, from this plan, that members of the CEA and of the college section of the NOTE would, for the most part, transfer their allegiance to the English Department of the MLTA, and that the two present organizations would probably cease to exist.

What do the members of CEA think of this prospect? What would be the gains and losses?

—Norman Foerster,
University of Iowa.

English for Aviation Students

The inclusion of English in the course of study for aviation students in the Army Air Forces' College Training Detachment programs solved one problem of the English instructor, that of whom to teach. But it posed another, perhaps even more serious, that of what to teach. The only direction from "Headquarters" was that one should aim the teaching at "precision and facility in basic communication". It was, indeed, difficult to know what to include in such a course when the educational backgrounds of the men ran through all stages of development from grade school training to that required for the M.A. or even the Ph.D. degrees. The course of study outlined here did not solve all the problems involved, of course, but it brought some order out of confusion and gave direction and specific purpose to the teaching of English to men interested in flying.

The course, designed for written communication, was divided into projects based on figures and diagrams. The plan was to apply the principles of good writing to subjects of interest and importance to students of aviation. It was such a plan as is called "practical", "functional", or "sugar-coated", but developed with the instructor as well as the student in mind. There were forty relatively short projects in writing and eight longer ones, arranged so that any one unit might be omitted, extended, or transposed, according to the particular needs and abilities of the class. The figures were designed to stimulate the interest and imagination of students in aviation and were simple enough for the beginner (and for the instructor who was out of his field), but exact enough for the more advanced student. Thus each student could find his own level and proceed from there.

For example, the first unit consisted of eleven problems of writing about five maps, arranged in order of increasing complexity. The student was asked to describe points on the maps accurately and in complete sentences as if he were explaining what he had seen from

the air. Instructors discovered that students were quick to recognize hazy, inaccurate, or misleading diction and to insist that the writer should "say what he means". When the layout of an entire map is confused by one ambiguous word or one incomplete sentence, English suddenly becomes "more important" to even the inexperienced student.

The second unit was on aircraft identification and design and called for descriptions and comparisons of types of planes represented in diagrams. For example, the student was asked to describe a given plane for a co-ed, for a twelve-year-old boy, and for a flight instructor. The technical knowledge some of the men expected of co-eds was flattering but unwarranted, as was proved when the co-eds themselves were asked to read and criticize papers presumably written for them.

There were units on meteorology, navigation, airplane instruments, flight maneuvers, army abbreviations (as used in official communications), and military correspondence. The instructor was able to guide writing and discussion into whatever channels he wished, using the problems as points of departure. For instance, one instructor discovered a class which enjoyed thirty minutes on the cosmography of "Paradise Lost", a discussion which grew quite naturally out of short definitions of "atmosphere", "stratosphere", "troposphere", and "ionosphere".

Sections on outlining, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary were used in connection with the appropriate projects or as separate material in classes which needed more drill in fundamentals. The vocabulary lists were made up of the most frequently used words found in dictionaries of aviation terms, with separate tests given over the lists and with emphasis placed on the correct use of the words in writing.

The course adapted itself well to laboratory procedure since the work consisted largely of the writing, finishing, and reading of papers in class. When students were on crowded schedules this became an advantage and tended to create more interest in the class itself. Each student was able to profit by the experience of other members of the class, and work was supervised and directed by the instructor, who had some time for individual instruction even in fairly large classes. The amount of paper grading was decreased because the writing called for was of that type which requires much thought and rewriting by the student and does not grow into lengthy and wordy discourse. Some themes of the research type were included in classes which had time for and could make good use of library sources.

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A Catholic Teacher Looks at American Literature

The alleged dual political allegiance of Catholic Americans has been so often and so heatedly debated by men of good will, so often and so shamelessly exploited by arrant rascals, that one hesitates to bring up the question in the placid pages of the "News Letter." That I am permitted to raise theological ghosts, even tangentially, is a tribute both to editorial tolerance and to professional magnanimity. It is also an open confession of a temerity of spirit, at once characteristically Catholic and American—hence, by no means merely personal. What I shall say, nevertheless, enjoys neither the impersonal "imprimatur" of statistical inquiry nor the "nihil obstat" of wiser and more experienced heads. My observations pretend to be nothing more than those of one lone teacher of American literature in a comparatively obscure Catholic college. My ancestors, Catholic and American, early developed in me a curiosity about my two-fold cultural heritage, a curiosity still seeking fuller satisfaction.

Except during the dear dead days of the Hoover-Smith campaign, I have scarcely bothered my head about whether Pope or President had first claim to my political allegiance. Even then I advanced the arguments to prove my patriotism without the least awareness that I was either indulging in Jesuitical casuistry or preparing myself for a berth in that asylum to which all well split personalities should go. I have, on the other hand, suffered a good many uncomfortable hours when my eyes, made Catholic by baptism, have searched long and lovingly the pages of American literature from Captain John to Betty Smith; when my mind, schooled in the rational realism of Aquinas, has tried to wrestle with Edwards on foreordination or with Emerson on the Over-soul; and when my conscience, trained to discern the scent of sin, original and aboriginal, has been exposed to the devils of Scarlet Letters and the deep black sea of naturalistic novels.

I am gratefully aware that our literature has been kept unsullied from the deliberately pornographic, that it has reflected high ideals of patriotism, pioneer courage, and devotion to all Four Freedoms. From close study, especially of the writers of the New England Renaissance, I have been made doubly happy to find rather numerous and strong traces of Catholic influence stirring the imaginations and emotions of the grandsons of the Puritans. I regret of course that there

(Continued on Page Four)

THE NEWS LETTER

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Editorial

Teaching and Research — these are, theoretically, the two preoccupations of the college English teacher; and for some strange reason many have come to think of them as clashing interests. Yet obviously they are interdependent, each essential to the other.

Research without teaching may profit no one save the researcher, and tend to dry up all his juices until he turns to dust and blows away. Teaching without research becomes repetitious, monotonous, cut-and-dried. "Repetition, like re-hashed cabbage, kills the school-masters" was said two thousand years ago; and today we admit that it destroys not only the teacher but the essential enthusiasm of his pupil.

But administrators, for one reason or another, view research-without-teaching with a certain benevolence. If the budget would only permit a few specimens to be kept mulling about the place, how pleasantly atmospheric the campus would be! A musty pedant plodding daily from lodging to library and from library to lunch is pointed out to parents and trustees with an indefinable pride.

Teaching-without-research has no conscious defenders; but the trouble is that one cannot prove its existence. The conscientious teacher who is constantly refurbishing and refurbishing his mind does not talk about it, but lets us take it for granted; while the teacher whose mind is not as well furnished today as it was when he began teaching, because the old furniture has worn out, can for a time deceive everyone but his students, and they seldom know what is the matter.

To the administrator, the proof of research is Publication—with a

capital P. Not that he wishes to read all the marked copies of technical journals, all the learned disquisitions, all the off-prints and reprints,—God forbid!—but he wants to see them, and mention them at alumni meetings and in annual reports. Long printed lists of faculty publications are ozone in his nostrils; for they prove the height and breadth and depth of "my faculty" and testify to the discernment of him who assembled or retained such a coterie. The faculty names upon that list are the sheep of his pasture; all others are goats.

So there comes to be a premium upon "publication", and the printers rejoice. Learned journals bulge with addresses before learned societies, and republished classroom lectures, and committee reports. Addresses which were never delivered, because the Committee felt that even an academic audience could stand no more, are recommended for publication as a balm for wounded pride. One member of our own association has urged that if this four-page periodical had a more impressive title a contributor to it might earn greater "credit" in the eyes of his employer. As to credit in the eyes of readers—what if there were no readers?

If these passing thoughts seem to any reader blasphemous, or even mildly jaundiced, we suggest the following laboratory experiment. Go across campus to the Library, near the first of the month, and seat yourself quietly near the racks where the learned journals and educational periodicals are displayed; then unostentatiously spread a thin layer of mucilage over the tops of the closed pages of those which have most recently arrived. When they are dry, replace them in the racks. Return in four weeks and see how many pages of how many magazines are ungummed.

In an undergraduate college, research stimulated by teaching, and teaching stimulated by research both indicate health and vitality. Research for the sake of publication suggests that the publicity man is earning his salary. But publication for the sake of publication indicates something rotten in the state of Academia.

Regional Meetings

Transportation difficulties evidently reduce the enthusiasm for group meetings. But so many have indicated a willingness to serve on local committees that your secretary urges these high-spirited members to organize small meetings wherever two or more colleges are conveniently adjacent; and then call on the Secretary to help with program and announcement.

The Student's Reaction To Internationalism

In some of the colleges a brief questionnaire has been used to discover how students react to problems of international relations. Apparently it is hoped that the answers the people of America give to these questions, especially the answers given by those in authority, may in large measure determine the kind of peace and the

durability of the peace that is to follow this war. I have seen no report of the results of this investigation and I myself have only a meager report to give, a mere straw in the wind.

Three questions were submitted to forty-two students with the following results:

1. Do you believe that the United States should belong to an international organization with authority to settle disputes between nations? Yes, 41; no, 1.

2. Should such an organization have available a military force solely to stop armed aggression and maintain peace? Yes, 35; no, 6.

3. Should the United States take the initiative in calling the United Nations to form such an organization? Yes, 27; no, 14.

If these questions, or similar ones, were subject of discussion in all of the thirty-three countries whose governments have voluntarily linked their fortunes and contributed their wealth for the prosecution of the war, surely some good would come of it. These United Nations have it within their power to prevent a repetition of the present horror.

—A. L. Phillips,
Teachers College,
Mayville, North Dakota.

Here and There With V-12

Until I feel surer of myself, may I remain anonymous, except that I teach English to Navy apprentices? Too many of my students resent the English requirement. It isn't that they dislike the study in normal times, but they think now it interferes with the main business of getting ready for combat duty. When they say they have no time to read, they mean that they have no time for the kind of reading the teacher wants done. But I find that 75% of them get in a good deal of reading at odd moments—'Esquire', 'Reader's Digest', 'Time', and a great lot of 'pulp' and adventure stories.

So I have tried taking them just where I find them and going forward from there. What are the great adventure stories? Jules Verne, Stevenson, Kingsley, Dumas, Rider Haggard, John Buchan, — many of my boys have read many of these, but when they try one they have not read, they regard me with new respect. They find I like that sort of reading, too.

My next step is to ask them to consider why some of the old adventure stories have lived and why some of the current pulp material will not. What is the difference? Can they set up for themselves some kind of literary standard?

Further steps are now being tested by a process of trial and error. But they are now ready to admit that there is an adventure story at the core of "Merchant of Venice" quite as lively and sensational as any pulp writer has recently invented; and "Tale of Two Cities" is unquestionably a thriller. What are the next steps?

—College Teacher.

A college English teacher now in the Army sends us a copy of instructions issued with a sticker to be attached to the windshield of a motor car.

IMMERSE STICKER IN WATER for about 5 seconds and apply immediately on clean dry glass. Do not moisten sticker with sponge or rag, or **WET CLEAN GLASS**, using plenty of water, and apply dry sticker.

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Reading and Writing; Listening and Speaking

The Iconic Law

By imitating others or by learning rules, you have already learned some good English and some bad. You have ten weeks to eliminate bad habits of spelling, grammar, punctuation, and articulation. But now that you are in college and in the navy, you have to learn to see, hear, and pass on, new and deeper thoughts. In this connection blind imitation and learning rules will not help. You must understand laws and principles, and apply them for yourself.

Whether you are reading or listening, writing or speaking, there is one principle you must never forget, what we call the **ICONIC LAW**, from the Greek word icon, meaning an image or likeness. Iconic means resembling. And the Iconic Law reads: "Statements should bear as close a resemblance to the nature of their subject matter as the nature of the audience will allow. Only if the level, volume, speed, and color of your words are like what you want to say, will people like what you say. Below you will find examples of the Iconic Law.

1. The Intellectual Level of Words

If you mean "Put out the lights," do not say "Illumination is required to be extinguished." Do not use abstract and passive forms for concrete and active situations.

2. The Social Level of Words

You may darken ship in Comstock House, for there you are aboard; it is more like a ship than anything else. You should not darken ship in McCormick, where you are ashore.

3. The Volume of Words

A torrent of words is meaningless except as an expression of emotion. You have to canalize words into chapters, paragraphs, and sentences; you have to siphon off clauses and phrases.

a) For simple ideas and actions use simple and compound sentences: Sighted sub; sank same. But just try describing the complexities of a big battle without complex sentences!

b) When a thought has to sink in or you have to take a deep breath, remember to use the semi-colon, the heavy mark of punctuation between the comma and the period: Sighted sub; sank same.

c) Remember specially to siphon off non-restrictive clauses with commas. Thus "The boys at Sampson see shows that never come to Schine's" but "GWTW, which was (of course) popular in the North, was also a smash-hit in Atlanta".

4. The Transference of Words

a) Words refer originally to what can be seen in space; at refers to a

point, on to a plane, in to a volume etc.; when you transfer them metaphorically to time you get the corresponding phrases at 0900 or about 0900 (never at about 0900!), on Wednesday, in March.

b) When you transfer them to human beings you must be even more careful or you will mix your metaphors when you don't mean to. "By my efforts I feel that fruition has been denied to the possibilities inherent in a situation whose imminence was perceptible by its suspicious redolence" is our old friend "I smelt a rat; I saw it floating in the air; I nipped it in the bud."

—T. S. K. Scott-Craig,
Hobart College.

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Suggestions for Post-War Colleges

(Continued from January issue)

Insist on any graduate candidate's knowing the life of any period he professes to know well; how many students of the eighteenth century know anything at all of Reynolds, Gainsborough, Wedgwood, Adam, Sheraton, Haydn, Mozart? How many could assist any director of a Goldsmith play to plan correct costume detail, and to manage correct manners in address and movement? One does not know a century without these things. Yet in asking to have a class in Elizabeth English learn the pronunciation of Tudor people, one is told that nobody cares how the language is pronounced—the language specialist is willing to teach only its semantics.

III. Laying Stress on Expression:—most graduate students read vilely—either with no taste at all, or with affectations. No one should be permitted to teach literature unless he can read it so well as to inflame a class with excitement. No one should attempt to teach composition without being an excellent reader; the student should be reminded constantly of the common factors in written and spoken expression, instead of being allowed to consider them completely different. Punctuation will take on a new force if the instructor shows how badly poor punctuation affects a reader.

—graduate reports which have come to my hands, and specifically theses, show a serious lack of any gift or training in organization, grace, definiteness, clarity. Few graduate professors in seminars or in the direction of theses seem to take requisite care to have the work re-written until it is passably the expression of a human being writing English. The most vilely pedantic lumping of facts is accepted as a work of scholarly genius if the student has discovered a new parallel between a source or an influence and an author under consideration; this is not scholarship but a very narrow craftsmanship merely. (My own last four thesis writers have been obliged to re-write their material three times—one of them four; naturally they hate me, but they have finally produced sense, well expressed.)

—some direction should be given by older members of departments, with ardor and sympathy, to graduates in the art of composition and of teaching composition. These students, who will for the most part teach nothing else for the first five years of their teaching careers, are allowed (and in some instances lightly encouraged) to regard freshman composition as a vile necessity, beneath the attention of the learned, who merely depend on it to earn a living while pursuing the higher levels of expression. No wonder lower schools are encouraged, and education departments allowed, to belittle writing.

IV.—Creating Disciplines Which Render the Graduate Capable Without Necessarily a Ph.D.:

—the degree of Ph.D., demanded

by many colleges in order to be sure that the candidate is not merely a windy "inspirer", but demanded by many from sheer snobbery, is fast becoming a joke. Graduates allude to it correctly as the Union ticket. It makes possible the elevation of memorizing pedants to position of trust which should be occupied only by enriched and cultivated teachers; the requirements make leisurely and well-filled graduate study and reading impossible, the result being a tangle of red tape and superficially acquired notions of English literature.

—men capable by their own efforts and their knowledge of libraries and great works should be admitted to direction of graduate courses, and not prohibited from teaching in college at all. (Such a case occurred recently in a western university, where a man who had directed graduates in bibliography was not retained as instructor, because he lacked the Ph.D. title. To get it he would have had to waste a year at least in gaining the superficial command of primitive languages demanded by most universities.)

—M. Bailey,
Stanford University.

English for Aviation

(Continued from Page One)

Formal speech training was not a part of this course although it might easily have been made so by the assigning of some of the problems for oral rather than for written explanation.

In any course which includes material outside the instructor's normal scope some study on his part is necessary for the first presentation. Aeronautics is new to many of the students themselves, however, and since this writing had as its purpose the effective communication of information from the writer to someone who does not have that

information, the instructor of English was in a good position to judge the student's success or failure and to help him improve the form of his written communication.

The increased interest in a course of this kind actually lightened the burden of the harassed English teacher facing classes of men admittedly hostile to his subject. When the student discovered that he was to learn something about airplanes and flying and to convey that learning to someone else in good English, with "precision and facility," he saw the point and no longer asked, "Why do I have to take English when I simply want to fly?"—Geraldine Hammond,
University of Wichita.

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**A Catholic Teacher Looks
At American Literature**

(Continued from Page One)

are, for very understandable reasons, no Catholic names in American letters comparable to Chaucer, Dryden, Newman, and Francis Thompson, and I hesitate to magnify the literary stature of writers like Father Tabb, Louise Guiney, and Miss Agnes Repplier.

My most unpleasant moments come when I recognize in any synthesis of our literary and cultural history, Parrington's or Cargill's or Curti's that, in spite of peripheral contributions from Catholic and French and Spanish sources, the Main Stream of American literature and its principal tributaries have been Protestant, deistic, transcendental, "liberal", and naturalistic. Catholic teachers of other literatures, especially those of Greece and Rome, once faced, it is true, even greater embarrassment. The ancient classics, however, have held from almost immemorial time such a sacrosanct position in the Catholic educational scheme that the moral and theological difficulties of the early Fathers of the Church have disappeared or have been absorbed in establishing a tradition in which Plato rubs elbows with Augustine, Virgil is hailed as a Christian poet, and the best of pagan minds recognized as "naturally Christian". French literature in its Golden Age was most certainly Catholic, and the continuity of that tradition in French letters has remained secure, if not wholly undefiled, from the early Middle Ages to Claudel and Mauriac. As a teacher of English literature, I experience some very real difficulties, especially in the long stretch of time that has followed what the Tractarians called National Apostasy. That the Catholic tradition has never wholly died but has often and, at most unexpected moments, replenished and purified "The Well of English", has been ably demonstrated by such American scholars as President George N. Shuster of Hunter College and Professor Blanche Mary Kelly of the College of Mount Saint Vincent. American literature almost alone among modern literatures seems to present to the Catholic scholar and teacher the dilemma of cultural separateness.

I say "seems" because I have come to recognize one important contribution which Catholic scholars and teachers can make to the reading and understanding of American literary traditions. Even we laymen can learn to turn the light of Catholic theology upon the devious roads and by-paths of American religious history from the days of the Cottons and the Mathers to the present. We can thus contribute what, I submit, is a unique answer to the call Professor Howard Mumford Jones issued back in 1928, when he warned American literary historians that they can neglect the European backgrounds of our culture, particularly the theological, only at the price of a narrow and rootless provincialism. A fine example has already been set for us by historians like Father

Arthur J. Riley in his studies in New England religious history. Personally I have often been frankly shocked by the smug ignorance of scholars and critics who have patronized Puritan adherence to the Christian belief in the workings of Divine Providence and have thought of Wigglesworth's famous reference to the "easiest room in hell" as a "horrible" invention of John Calvin. Surely that kind of literary scholarship which is the product of modernistic unbelief can hardly be expected to understand very much of American literature before Whitman, not even that of the Age of Reason, because it cannot really appreciate how deists like Franklin and Paine got that way." It is too much like the prodigious energy of Leslie Stephen writing the "History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century" to fortify his own agnosticism.

It would be ironical, indeed, were the spiritual sons and daughters of the Pope to be among the first, along with pioneers like Professors Morrison and Miller, to let the light shine upon the darkened ways of the Puritan Mind as it rose and fell and finally lost itself in the broad and expansive road that has made us Americans all. Here is a challenge to the Catholic teacher of American literature that may in the beginning "turn blue blood red with rage" but will eventually serve for the mutual enlightenment of all those who would live in the spirit.

—Jeremiah K. Durick,
St. Michael's College,
Winooski Park, Vermont.

**The Humanities
After the War**

In a little book of 95 pages bearing this title, Norman Foerster has assembled seven essays of his own selection and added an illuminating preface. How can we avoid neglecting the humane values in the future as we have in the recent past is answered by Wendell L. Willkie, Roscoe Pound, Theodore M. Greene, Abraham Flexner, William Macneille Dixon, Gordon Keith Chalmers and Norman Foerster.

"With few exceptions," writes the compiler, "the departments of the humanities in higher education are ill prepared for the high task before them. They have misapplied the method of science, and they have adopted views of life that make most of the great writers and thinkers of the world appear of little meaning to the modern age. Lost in a relativism approaching nihilism, they have all but ceased to look for the abiding truths which make the distinction between past and present unimportant. If for a century they have declined in prestige, the reason is partly that they themselves have robbed their great field of its greatness. Today their first task is to refine themselves, not to encourage an intellectual and artistic creativity of any and every sort, but rather to lay the critical foundations which will give imaginative presentation a sound direction."

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